# Sick children at Edinburgh hospital face charges for tutoring denied to state pupils



Sick children at one of Scotland's leading children's hospitals are facing a stark educational inequity, with those attending private schools being denied free tutoring services offered to their state-school counterparts. At the Royal Hospital for Children and Young People in Edinburgh, parents of children, including cancer patients, have been informed that they must pay £115 per hour for one-to-one tutoring, while those in state education receive this service at no cost. This policy has ignited considerable outrage among families who feel it discriminates against their children during vulnerable times.

In the same hospital, parents have witnessed other children in neighbouring beds receiving the educational support their own children are barred from. One mother described the emotional toll as her son, who was undergoing chemotherapy, had to endure extended hospitalisation without educational resources. “When they realised he went to a private school, they told us there was a problem,” she recounted, emphasising that the family felt they were being punished for their choice of education.

The decision has been backed by local council officials, who argue that it aligns with Scottish Government guidelines. However, this rationale raises questions when compared to practices in other hospitals, such as Great Ormond Street Hospital in London, where children from all backgrounds are afforded equal access to educational support. Dr Lynne Binnie, Head of Education (Inclusion) for the council, stated that families have 'effectively opted out of state-funded education' by choosing private schooling. This strict adherence to policy has been perceived as a political stance rather than a compassionate response to the needs of seriously ill children.

Compounding the issue is a backdrop of ongoing financial pressures faced by Edinburgh City Council, which is contemplating cuts of £4 million to services aimed at supporting vulnerable children. Such cuts could further strain educational resources for sick children, leaving families concerned about the continuity of support amid lengthy hospital stays. Campaigners fear that these reductions could lead to severe gaps in educational provisions, exacerbating the already fraught situation.

Interestingly, while Edinburgh grapples with these issues, other regions in Scotland appear to be navigating similar challenges differently. For instance, in Glasgow, educational support is provided without additional charges, with local authorities recovering costs afterward—a model that highlights the disparity in approach across the country. This discrepancy raises critical questions about the principles of equity and access in education, particularly for children facing serious health challenges.

In light of these differing policies, Shadow Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Craig Hoy MSP, has expressed his intention to raise the concerns surrounding the Edinburgh hospital's practices in the Scottish Parliament. He urged that councils should not impose what he described as 'punitive charges' on sick children, advocating for a reevaluation of how educational support is structured across the state's healthcare facilities.

Overall, the situation at the Royal Hospital for Children and Young People has sparked a wider conversation about the access to education for vulnerable children, the implications of policy decisions on their well-being, and the ongoing need for inclusive practices that honour each child's right to learn—no matter their educational background. As developments unfold, the hope remains that all sick children can receive equitable educational support, allowing them the continuity of learning they so desperately need during challenging times.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14746657/Cancer-patients-childrens-hospital-denied-free-lessons-private-schools.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[4]](https://www.edinburghnews.scotsman.com/news/opinion/columnists/our-schools-are-ready-to-cater-for-all-education-needs-joan-griffiths-4952627)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14746657/Cancer-patients-childrens-hospital-denied-free-lessons-private-schools.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[2]](https://www.scotsman.com/education/council-cuts-to-impact-teaching-staff-at-edinburghs-sick-kids-hospital-4811404), [[6]](https://www.scotsman.com/education/edinburgh-schools-influx-of-pupils-after-removal-of-vat-exemption-for-private-education-fails-to-materialise-4996921)
* Paragraph 3 – [[2]](https://www.scotsman.com/education/council-cuts-to-impact-teaching-staff-at-edinburghs-sick-kids-hospital-4811404), [[5]](https://www.scotsman.com/education/edinburgh-state-secondaries-inundated-with-applications-ahead-of-vat-private-school-fee-charge-4899477)
* Paragraph 4 – [[3]](https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/24479091.edinburgh-state-schools-can-cope-private-pupil-surge-say-council/), [[6]](https://www.scotsman.com/education/edinburgh-schools-influx-of-pupils-after-removal-of-vat-exemption-for-private-education-fails-to-materialise-4996921)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14746657/Cancer-patients-childrens-hospital-denied-free-lessons-private-schools.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[3]](https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/24479091.edinburgh-state-schools-can-cope-private-pupil-surge-say-council/), [[7]](https://www.scotsman.com/education/private-school-parents-flood-edinburgh-state-schools-with-vat-charge-enquiries-here-is-where-4864966)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14746657/Cancer-patients-childrens-hospital-denied-free-lessons-private-schools.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[6]](https://www.scotsman.com/education/edinburgh-schools-influx-of-pupils-after-removal-of-vat-exemption-for-private-education-fails-to-materialise-4996921)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14746657/Cancer-patients-childrens-hospital-denied-free-lessons-private-schools.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.scotsman.com/education/council-cuts-to-impact-teaching-staff-at-edinburghs-sick-kids-hospital-4811404> - Edinburgh City Council is considering £4 million cuts to support services for vulnerable children, which could affect teaching staff at the Royal Hospital for Children and Young People. The proposed reductions are part of a broader £30 million spending cut for 2025/26, with an additional £80 million in cuts over the following three years. Campaigners have expressed concerns that these cuts would remove essential teaching support for hospitalized children, potentially impacting their education during extended stays.
3. <https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/24479091.edinburgh-state-schools-can-cope-private-pupil-surge-say-council/> - Edinburgh City Council has stated that it has the capacity to accommodate an influx of pupils from private schools due to the introduction of VAT on private school fees. The council insists that classrooms are not 'fit to burst' and that there is space for an additional 12,700 pupils in the city's schools. This response addresses concerns about potential overcrowding in state schools as private school students transition to the state sector.
4. <https://www.edinburghnews.scotsman.com/news/opinion/columnists/our-schools-are-ready-to-cater-for-all-education-needs-joan-griffiths-4952627> - Councillor Joan Griffiths, Convenor of the Education, Children and Families Committee, addresses concerns about the impact of VAT on private school fees. She emphasizes that Edinburgh's schools are prepared to meet the educational needs of all children, regardless of their previous schooling. The council is monitoring inquiries and applications for school places and is collaborating with both council departments and the independent school sector to ensure a smooth transition for students moving to state schools.
5. <https://www.scotsman.com/education/edinburgh-state-secondaries-inundated-with-applications-ahead-of-vat-private-school-fee-charge-4899477> - Edinburgh's state secondary schools have received a significant number of applications from parents of private school pupils in anticipation of the VAT being applied to private school fees. Since June, there have been 144 applications for places at council-run schools, with 120 for secondary and 24 for primary levels. This surge is attributed to the upcoming tax change, which is expected to increase private school fees and prompt families to consider state education options.
6. <https://www.scotsman.com/education/edinburgh-schools-influx-of-pupils-after-removal-of-vat-exemption-for-private-education-fails-to-materialise-4996921> - Contrary to predictions, the anticipated influx of pupils into Edinburgh's state schools following the removal of VAT exemption on private education has not materialized. Between June 1, 2024, and January 2025, only 58 pupils previously attending independent schools enrolled in city schools. The Scottish Council of Independent Schools noted that while some families have been forced to leave private schools, the full impact on the public sector will become clearer over time.
7. <https://www.scotsman.com/education/private-school-parents-flood-edinburgh-state-schools-with-vat-charge-enquiries-here-is-where-4864966> - Parents of private school pupils in Edinburgh have made numerous inquiries about places in the city's state schools following the announcement of VAT being applied to private school fees. Between June and September, there were 150 contacts with council-run schools from families with children in private schools. This reflects concerns about the financial impact of the VAT charge and the potential need to transition to state education.